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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KAMPALA 000946

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR KDEM EPEP UG

SUBJECT: MUSEVENI MIXES TOXIC BREW OF ETHNICITY AND OIL IN
WESTERN UGANDA

REF: KAMPALA 00366

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Aaron Sampson, Embassy Kampala, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. An internal July 15 memo from Ugandan President Museveni has deepened the ethnic divide between groups living atop newfound oil reserves in Uganda's Western Region. The memo, which was leaked to the press on August 2, instructs the Minister for Presidential Affairs to consider restricting key elected offices - including parliamentary seats - in what was once the Bunyoro Kingdom in Western Uganda to ethnic Banyoro only. The memo also recommends preferential land ownership rights for ethnic Banyoro for the next twenty years. Museveni's memo may have been designed to appease, or perhaps distract, Banyoro leaders angered by long-standing land disputes and the government's continued refusal to reveal plans for oil revenue sharing (reftel). Banyoro leaders have hailed the President's proposal as a major step toward protecting the Banyoro identity and redressing century old claims against the British colonial government. The national press, civil society groups, and parliamentarians from a broad range of political perspectives, meanwhile, have condemned the idea as a step toward "tribalism." Museveni subsequently tried to soothe tensions heightened by his memo by meeting separately with Banyoro and non-Banyoro community representatives in Kampala. Police also hauled the newspaper editor responsible for reprinting the memo in for questioning. Museveni has not backed away from the idea of investing specific ethnic groups with special electoral privileges in Western Uganda, and several members of his Cabinet who hail from Bunyoro have ratcheted up pressure on Museveni to move forward with his proposal. Museveni's apparent willingness to consider rewarding one ethnic constituency by disenfranchising many others reinforces concerns about his re-election strategy for 2011 and Uganda's commitment to the transparent management of impending oil revenues. End Summary.

Museveni's "Ring-Fence" Memo

¶2. (U) During the weekend of August 1-2, local newspapers printed a memo from President Museveni to his Cabinet Minister in Charge of Presidential Affairs, Beatrice Wabudyea, entitled "Guidance on the Banyoro/Bafuruki Question." Banyoro are "indigenous" residents of the Bunyoro Kingdom, which comprises four districts along the shores of Lake Albert in Western Uganda. Bafuruki is a term used to describe non-Banyoro Ugandan "immigrants" who migrated to Bunyoro during the 1980s. Minister Wabudyea belongs to a Cabinet level sub-committee previously established to examine Banyoro/Bafuruki tensions. In his memo Museveni faults so-called Bafuruki for infringing on Banyoro culture and political space. Invoking Article 32 of Uganda's 1995 constitution, which authorizes the state to take "affirmative action" in favor of groups marginalized by "gender, age,

disability, or any other reason," the President instructs Minister Wabudeya to consider restricting - or in the President's words "ring-fencing" - elected offices in Bunyoro to ethnic Banyoro candidates only. This would prevent non-Banyoros from contesting Parliament seats and key local level posts.

13. (SBU) The memo also recommends giving land ownership rights to ethnic Banyoro resident in Bunyoro since 1964, thereby resolving land disputes stemming from the colonial era when the British attributed swaths of Bunyoro to largely absent Buganda landowners from central Uganda. Museveni recommends preventing Bafuruki from obtaining any additional land titles and appropriate compensation for absent Buganda landholders for a period of 20 years. Newly titled ethnic Banyoro landholders would have the power to lease their newly acquired property, presumably to oil exploration firms for profit.

Ring-Fence as Political Third Rail

14. (U) A number of Parliamentarians, including some from Museveni's own National Resistance Movement (NRM), immediately condemned the ring-fence proposal as a recipe for ethnic division or worse. Several outspoken NRM Parliamentarians from Western Uganda and elsewhere described the idea as an unconstitutional non-starter and joined opposition calls for a presidential retraction. Parliamentarian Erias Lukwago, also Attorney General of the opposition Democracy Party (DP), described ring-fencing of

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specific elective offices as treasonous. Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) Treasury General Jack Sabiiti warned that ring-fencing would exacerbate ethnic tensions. "If President Museveni does not withdraw his statements on Bunyoro politics and land," Sabiiti told one local newspaper on August 3, "he will be held responsible for any tribal clash or chaos that may erupt in this area." Sabiiti also highlighted the artificial nature of precise ethnic categorization by noting that intermarriage and other factors often make it impossible to discern just who belongs to which ethnic group. Other commentators seized on the precedent of ring-fencing, warning that the President's proposal smacked of ethnically based gerrymandering which, if applied to other parts the country, would heighten ethnic divisions by creating a series of "bantustans".

Political Pandering?

15. (U) FDC Secretary General Alice Alaso interpreted President Museveni's suggestion as a political ploy to enlist Banyoro support in advance of the 2011 presidential elections. She noted that while the FDC's president and presidential candidate Kizza Besigye still lost Bunyoro to Museveni during the 2006 elections, the gap between Besigye and Museveni was much narrower than during the 2001 presidential contest, even though Museveni still won approximately 81 percent of the vote in Bunyoro. Besigye has reportedly been working to increase his profile in Bunyoro. Alaso argued that the ring-fence memo was part of a broader NRM strategy to shore up support in the four districts that comprise the Bunyoro Kingdom. A number of Bunyoro Kingdom officials have subsequently come out in favor of the President's "ring-fencing" idea, both as a means of protecting the supposedly "marginalized" Banyoro's identity and culture and as a revolutionary way to compensate the Banyoro for colonial injustices perpetrated during the late 19th century.

Damage Control, Sort Of

16. (U) President Museveni and some senior Cabinet Ministers met with selected non-Banyoro leaders in Entebbe during the weekend of August 8-9 to ease concerns among Bunyoro's "Bafuruki" or "immigrant" community. Museveni reportedly urged an amicable solution to the Banyoro-Bafuruki conflict and said the NRM was committed to promoting peace and unity in Bunyoro. On August 10, Information and National Guidance Minister Kabakumba Matsiko said Uganda was working on a way for Banyoro and non-Banyoro to peacefully co-exist in Western Uganda. Minister of Internal Affairs Matia Kasaija, however, reportedly delivered a slightly different message to Banyoro leaders in Kampala. According to one local newspaper account, Kasaija, who is from Bunyoro, praised Museveni's ring-fencing and land ownership proposals.

17. (U) At an August 15 "Bunyoro Symposium" in Kampala with Banyoro leaders, Minister Kasaija reiterated his support for "ring-fencing," claimed he had received death threats by text message, and complained that other unnamed members of Museveni's Cabinet were treating him and Information Minister Kabakumba Matsiko like "sectarians". According to local media reports, Kasaija told the symposium that Banyoro and other groups could co-exist in Western Uganda provided others "respect the culture and politics of indigenous people." "I want to assure you," one newspaper quoted Kasaija as saying, "that the government is behind us on our new struggle. That's why the President wrote this letter. We are not anti-people. All we want is fairness and respect."

18. (U) Two other individuals of note reportedly also spoke at the August 15 Bunyoro Symposium: the Bunyoro Kingdom's spokesman Henry Ford Miriima and Presidential Advisor on Land Issues Kasirivu Atwooki. In recent days Miriima has advocated for taking President Museveni's "ring-fencing" idea even further, arguing that non-Banyoro living in Bunyoro should assimilate into Banyoro culture and adopt the Banyoro language of Runyoro.

Newspaper Editor Questioned and Charged

19. (U) Local authorities summoned Daily Monitor Managing Editor Daniel Kalinaki for questioning on August 7 following the Daily Monitor's August 2 publication of the ring-fence memo. Kalinaki was out of the country at the time the

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summons was issued and reported to the Jinja Road police station on the morning of August 12. According to the Daily Monitor, police questioned Kalinaki for six hours on August 12 before charging him with forgery and uttering a false document. Kalinaki was released on bail of 10 million Shillings (approximately USD 5,000) and instructed to reappear on August 18. Each of the two charges carry potential three year prison terms. Kalinaki, his lawyer, and the Daily Monitor maintain that the text of the letter reproduced by the newspaper on August 2 was accurate. Kalinaki has already appeared before police once this year following a story critical of Uganda's operation against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In an apparently unrelated matter, a second Daily Monitor journalist was arrested and charged with criminal defamation earlier this week in northern Uganda.

Police on Alert in Bunyoro

10. (U) On August 11 in Hoima district in Bunyoro, unknown assailants reportedly burned the workshop of a non-Banyoro trader, leading the local police commander to deploy forces to prevent further unrest. The police commander told news outlets that the trader had been targeted because he was a

Bafuruki or non-Banyoro immigrant. The August 12 edition of the Daily Monitor reported that the attack followed a decision by the Bunyoro Kingdom to encourage non-Banyoro to register with authorities and assimilate into Banyoro culture. Local police attributed increased tensions in Bunyoro to a Bunyoro Kingdom initiative to map out land and property allegedly belonging to Banyoro. Newspapers have also reported plans by the Buganda Kingdom to proceed with an effort to register and provide ID cards to all ethnic Baganda. The Buganda Kingdom's Information Minister, Medard Lubega, told the Daily Monitor that the Kingdom wanted "to be sure about the origin of our people" for planning purposes. It is unlikely, however, that the Baganda have enough funds to actually implement this initiative.

Comment: Museveni Playing with Fire

¶11. (C) Tensions between the Banyoro and "immigrant" populations in Bunyoro have been simmering for some time. President Museveni's memo significantly heightened these tensions by elevating them to national prominence. Explanations of why Museveni seized on the Bunyoro question now, after more than two decades in power, focus on two topics: elections and oil. Using Uganda's 2002 census as a guide, one local news magazine noted that the Banyoro are in fact not marginalized and that ethnic Banyoro hold 10 of the 14 parliamentary seats from the four districts that make up the Bunyoro Kingdom. Although Banyoro appear to be the largest ethnic group in these districts, they do not hold a majority. Restricting elected offices to only ethnic Banyoro would therefore disenfranchise a majority of the population resident in these districts.

¶12. (C) Many interpret the "ring-fencing" memo leak as a deliberate attempt to reassure Banyoro leaders over the eventual distribution of oil revenues. During an August 13 meeting with the Embassy, Uganda's Parliamentary opposition leader Ogenga Latigo described the memo as Museveni's version of a trial balloon. "The letter was like throwing a stone into the bush to see what comes out," said Latigo. Latigo speculated that the subsequent response - overwhelming support from the Banyoro and resounding negativity from nearly everyone else - caught Museveni unaware. President Museveni's apparent willingness to fan ethnic tensions as a means of achieving political ends raises serious concerns about his re-election strategy for 2011 and Uganda's commitment to the transparent management of impending oil revenues. The only upside to this "ring-fencing" episode was the swift condemnation of the proposal by an eclectic range of actors from across Uganda.

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